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From commodification to weaponization: the Russian language as ‘pride’ and ‘profit’  
in Russia’s transnational discourses

Lara Ryazanova-Clarke

**Abstract**

The article expands the debate about the interaction and conflict of linguistic commodification with other values attached to a language. It interrogates Russian dominant discourse produced between 2010-2015, focusing on how it attributes the values of ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ to the Russian language in three transnational contexts: the narrative of ‘compatriots’ outside Russia, the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It argues that the discursive construction of Russian as a means for material advancement is constantly intertwined with manufacturing the transnational semantics of belonging to Russia (the transnational ‘pride’). This is often overlaid with the instrumental value-attribution for Russian for establishing and perpetuating power relations, exerting control and, finally, warmongering.

**Key words:** linguistic commodification, discourse, Russian, transnational, globalization, weaponization

**Introduction**

Recent literature on linguistic commodification (Cameron 2000; Heller 2003, 2010; 2011; Tan and Rubdy 2008; Duchêne 2009; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Heller and Duchêne 2012; Pavlenko 2012) has developed a new paradigm for the sociolinguistics of globalization. In particular, Duchêne and Heller (2012) have gone a long way towards defining the parameters of a commodification theory, based on the premise that in the late stage of neo-liberal capitalism, ‘there have been a wide-spread emergence of discursive elements that treat language and culture primarily in economic terms’ (Heller and Duchêne 2012, 2), in other words, that in certain socio-political situations language is increasingly configured as a commodity. They frame their argument with two contrasting tropes of ‘pride’ and ‘profit’, in which the value of language linked to its ability to produce economic and material gain is pitted against the ideology of language seen as an instrument of political and cultural value assignment.

Some scholars delving in the ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ distinction stress these are mutually constituted and form complex patterns of competition and intertwining,

which shape the ways in which social actors, movements and political economies mobilize or undermine the differentiating resources for their own ends (e.g. Gal 2012). Furthermore, exploration of the points of intersection of the ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ discourses reveals a whole lot of contradictions and cleavages emerging, in particular, from the clashes between the modern and the antiquated, global and local perspectives on a language (Heller 2010, 2011; Del Percio and Duchêne 2012; Gal 2012; Heller and Bell 2012; Heller and Duchêne 2012). A further unpacking of the interactions and contradictions between the two tropes is relevant with regard to situations in which the language as a source of symbolic added value may be amenable to patterns that could be called *imitational commodification* in which the language use or knowledge has a veneer of economic gain but also fulfils other instrumental purposes and objectives. This work therefore aims to expand our understanding of the complex and contradictory nature of linguistic commodification and its entanglements with the trope of ‘pride’, focusing on the contexts of the globalization of Russian.

Discussion of these contexts has to take into consideration that, as Sakwa argued, in globalization as in other meta-narratives that mediate international interaction, Russia ‘by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century stood at odds with the rest of the world’ (2011, 968). Specifically, our account of what speaking Russian means in the capitalist condition needs to reflect on the broadly expressed position that Russia has advanced and displayed on the global scale a peculiar form of ‘imitation capitalism’ (Gustafson 1999; Menshikov 2004; Belkovskii 2013; Shevtsova 2015), combining transnational economic outlook with de-modernising political trends. As Robinson stated, Russia presents a ‘political capitalist system’ which is ‘distinct from the types of capitalism that we know in the global West’ in that it ‘subordinates profit to political logic routinely’ (Robinson 2012b, 3).

To explore how Russia’s globalization ‘oddity’ relates to the discourses on language, this article relocates the discussion of the entwining tropes of ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ to the heart of Russia’s hegemonic discursive formation -- a space in which the construction of the dominant vision of globalization takes place. The study aims to analyze how the theme of the Russian language emerges in the dominant Russian narratives of transnational and regional integration, how the language is attributed meanings corresponding with ‘pride’, ‘profit’ and indeed other instrumental values, and where the points of intersection of these values are.

The work draws on the Bourdieusian notion of symbolic value of a linguistic resource which can be transferred into instrumental and material values (Bourdieu 1991), and applies a broadly defined critical discourse studies approach (Blommaert 2005; Fairclough 1989, 1995; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Wodak and Chilton 2005; Wodak et al. 2009; Wodak 2013), in particular, work on the strategies of discursive meaning construction and subject categorization (van Leeuwen 1996, 2008; Wodak et al. 2009). The meaning construction and value attribution in relation to the Russian language is examined in three transnational contexts that emerged between 2010 and 2015 – the treatment of ‘compatriots’ outside Russia, the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It will be demonstrated that the discursive construction of value of the Russian language as a means for material advancement in the Russian transnational situations (‘profit’) is constantly intertwined with manufacturing the transnational semantics of belonging to Russia (what is termed here *the transnational ‘pride’*). This is often overlaid with the instrumental value-attribution for Russian for establishing and perpetuating power relations, exerting control and, finally, warmongering. The findings allow us to propose that the ‘profit’ trope in certain cases has an imitational variant, linked to the transmutations of values. My data are derived from the legal, governmental and media fields and contain texts of documents, discursive practices of the state officials, including President Putin and members of the State Duma, and the pro-Kremlin media outlets.

### **A transnational tint of the Russian language hegemonic ‘pride’**

From the tsars to Putin’s era the conventional discourse of ‘pride’, framed by the Herderian idea that language is bound to culture and territory, has been insufficient and incomplete in relation to Russian. With a long history of an imperial language, Russian has never been, strictly speaking, the language of an ethnic Russian nation-state and its employment in the construction of an ethno-national identity has been relatively weak.

There are two major facets to this legacy. The first one relates to the role of Russian in identity construction in the independent Russian state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, contradiction between the imperial and the national became one of the key tensions inherited by the Russian Federation from the Soviet institutionalized multinational and multilingual configuration (Brubaker 1996; Suny 2012, 17). While

the majority of non-Russian post-Soviet states have leaped to the post-multinational regime (Brubaker 2011) and embarked on vigorous nationalizing language policies favoring ‘one nation -- one language’ ideology, Russia continued replicating the Soviet-type multilingual rhetoric. As a demand grew in Russia for developing a coherent unifying national identity, especially pronounced under Putin’s rule, the multilingual rhetoric began to contradict the increasing attempts to use the Russian language as a core ‘pride’ concept in the national identity discourse (Ryazanova-Clarke 2006).

The trend for constructing a national ‘pride’ discourse around the Russian language is additionally disrupted by the second facet of the imperial legacy, namely that historically Russian was imbued with a strong symbolic value of a ‘transnational connector’. The language was integral to the centripetal force of recurring rounds of ‘mini-globalization’ whereby the ‘historic empire formation [was] involved in unification of the previously sequestered territories’ (Robertson 1990, 21). In the imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet epochs, Russian was that legitimate language which was called upon to structure the ideology of integration and coherence. In the Soviet period, this discourse valorized Russian as an inter-ethnic connector linking together disparate communities in and between the ‘brotherly’ Soviet republics and as a language which brought education, culture and technological advancement to the national peripheries (Mikhailchenko and Trushkova 2003). Moreover, for valorization of this kind it was not enough for Russian to be attributed qualities of an instrumental and utilitarian lingua franca, demands were also made on empathetic attachment and emotional loyalty towards the transnational connotations of the language able to provide unity, cohesion and cultural elevation of the ‘minor brothers’ (Suny 2012; Ryazanova-Clarke 2014b). This meant that the linguistic value of a ‘transnational connector’ have become linked to a specific ‘pride’ trope standing for Russia’s ambition and an assumed right for ‘holding together’ and control of the neighboring territories -- a transnational ‘pride’.

After the end of the Soviet Union, Russian was losing circulation in the majority of the new independent states and the transnational ‘pride’ attribute of Russian was demoted in value and status (Pavlenko 2008; Brubaker 2011). It was indeed the economic trigger which brought about the revitalization of the transnational meanings of Russian in the post-Soviet states. Russia’s emergence, from mid 2000s, as a globally reckoned economic power was crucial for a new stage in the globalization of

Russian and for the destabilization of the local discourses of ‘pride’, associated with ‘one nation – one language’ ideology. Since then the language experienced a comeback as a resource for promoting and delivering products and services to the increasingly important and regionally dominant Russian speaking customer and investor (Pavlenko 2012; Ryazanova-Clarke 2014a; Berezhkina this issue; Muth this issue). Illustrative of this process is a testimony by Armen Smbatian, the former ambassador of Armenia in Russia (Example 1):

(1) Even when we had the USSR, a friend of mine from Lithuania kept on saying: ‘Russians are the occupiers!’ But recently I met him. He has a business and apparently lots of friends in Russia. I told him: ‘Listen, you have been telling me all these tales about the occupiers!’ To which he says calmly: ‘It was then that they were occupiers and now they are clients.’ (*Izvestiia*, December 25, 2012)

At the same time, the transnational semantic fields defining Russian have been affected by the ‘pride’ overtones that have been on the rise internally. The hegemonic narrative was assuming a ‘patriotic’ flavor especially after Putin became president for the third time in 2012 (Dausé et al. 2015). It is now increasingly articulated by the ideologies of Russian nationalism and neo-imperialist revisionism which were encouraged to move mainstream out of the marginalized enclaves.<sup>1</sup> According to the ex-employee of the Institute for Strategic Studies Aleksandr Sytin, the new ideology was concocted from the elements of monarchism, Stalinism, Orthodoxy, xenophobia, and hatred towards the West (Volchek 2015). This, in effect, neo-imperial messianic doctrine speaks of the ‘civilisational community’ of *Russkii Mir* (The Russian World) and aims at creating new meta-narratives that legitimize Russia’s hegemony over the ‘Russian-speaking world’ beyond the Russian Federation by the claims of linguistic, ‘spiritual’ (*dukhovnyi*) and cultural unity (Shekhovtsov 2008, 2009; Bassin 2012; Umland 2012, 2013; Menkiszak 2014; Wawrzonek 2014; Laruelle 2015; Sooner 2015). The role of the Russian language in this ideology is crucial – it assumes the position of ‘pride’ but rather than linking it to the local level of cultural authenticity (Heller 2011; Heller and Duchene 2012), modifies it into a symbol of transnational connection to Russia, as seen in Example 2. The Example is an excerpt from an interview with Armen Airapetian, a member of the elite Izborsk Club and a lecturer at the Volga Region Management School. Evoking Russian imperial past Airapetian

uses the conquering flag metaphor to refer to the Russian language. In the ideology he embraces the 'pride' of the Russian language that stretches to other lands -- the 'pride' which is to be enforced:

(2) The Russian Emperor Nikolas I, once said: 'Where the Russian flag is raised, it will never be lowered.' After many years of my academic research I have come to the conclusion that today this flag is the Russian language.<sup>2</sup> (Izborskii klub 2014)

Thus, the combination of, on the one hand, linguistic globalization with, on the other, nationalist and neo-imperial ideology at home called upon a specific kind of discourses to construct the meanings of Russian for Russian hegemony. Even when the Russian language is relied upon as a 'pride' symbol of the internal nation-building, it has also been made available for the production of the transnational meanings connected to the historical rounds of 'mini-globalisation'. The rest of the article will explore the current discursive entanglements of the transnational 'pride' with the instrumental meanings attributed to Russian including those of the profitable economic advantage.

### **Patterns of discursive entwines**

#### *The Compatriot discourse*

Since approximately mid 2000s, the Russian state began vigorously to employ the Russian language at the international level instrumentally, attributing to it the meaning of a soft power resource. In this role, Russian was invested with the power to deliver influence to the outside world, or as Nye put it, to 'co-opt rather than coerce' and to 'shape the preferences of others' (Nye 2009, 22; Saari 2014).

In order to co-opt Russian speakers who live outside the Russian Federation a number of institutions were set up by the Kremlin. Among those the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) was established in 2008.<sup>3</sup> The category of 'compatriots' (*sootechestvenniki*) was constructed to include the Russian language speakers who reside outside Russia but who regardless of their passport nationality were deemed to belong to the realm controlled by the Russian state ('The Russian World') (Ryazanova-Clarke 2014b). Such categorization

espoused transnational ‘pride’ and was legitimized in The Law on the State Policy Towards Compatriots, whose multiple amendments show how the meanings attributed to the Russian language were reified in their relation to the compatriots. Originally the Law was adopted in 1999 to legislate for an option to return for those Russians who after the break up of the USSR had remained in former Soviet republics and who preferred at some stage to migrate to the Russian Federation. Since then, the Law was amended five times, including the more relatively recent July 2010 and July 2013 versions. The first definition of the compatriot was civic and inclusive, encompassing those who ever had citizenship of the USSR regardless of their current residence and nationality (O gosudarstvennoi politike 1999, Art. 1 para 2). By the second decade of the millennium, the post-Soviet states had drifted cardinally apart and the above categorization was changed. Instead of the civic criterion of a former citizenship, the redactions that followed conjured up the essentializing measurements of ‘compatriotism’ which listed the Russian language together with ethnicity, territory and culture to circumscribe the semantic field of belonging. The Russian language was now a key indicator of the compatriot and was linked not to all Soviet descendents but to those people who themselves, or whose ancestors or blood relatives had lived or have descended from the Russian territories and who claim to belong to the ethnic groups ‘who have historically lived in Russia’ (O gosudatstvennoi politike 2010, Art. 1, paras 2 and 3). Also, in the 2010 and 2013 amendments of the Law, semantic fields of affect and agency were added to the transnational ‘pride’ meaning construction. Similar to the Soviet practices described earlier, the subjects were expected not simply to be competent in Russian but to have an emotional contact with it – that is, to be active promoters and advocates of the language. Thus, the redaction of 2010 requires that self-identification as a Russian compatriot is to be ‘supported by the civic or professional activity to preserve the Russian language... [and] Russian culture abroad.’ In addition, the Law expects that compatriots engage in public diplomacy in support of Russia in the country of their residence (ibid., Art. 3, para 2).

The language, culture, ethnicity and land that evoke emotions are placed in the centre of the new discourse of transnational ‘pride’ around compatriots. In this discourse Russian speakers are constructed as a contemporary, globally sprawling virtual expanded ‘nation’ bound up with the eighteenth century Herderian sense that they command the language which reflects *Volksgeist* -- the spirit of this nation.



However the compatriot transnational 'pride' value seems to be mercurial as it is appropriated by an instrumental use by which loyalty to Russian language and culture is translated into the loyalty to the Russian state and is inscribed in the Law. Thus through the use of the 'pride' trope and its 'soft' linguistic and cultural imperatives -- the compatriot is transformed into a 'patriot'. The symbolic 'profit' of the activation of these semantic fields attributed to speaking Russian is that the law ultimately recruits the uncritical advocates of the Russian state, while the language and the sentiments of its users are used as an instrument enabling the Russian state to breed numbers of its promoters and defenders in the country of their residence. The Head of Rossotrudnichestvo Konstantin Kosachev spoke with an enviable frankness about the true objectives of compatriot cultivation in which his organization engages. Presenting the Rossotrudnichestvo's New Generation Program at the Duma he stressed that the visits to Russia they organize for the targeted groups are completely politically expedient: 'Naturally the purpose of these trips is not the visit itself, and even less so tourism, the participants should form an activist group of Russia's sympathizers' (Duma 10 April 2013).

Furthermore, those who can demonstrate their ability to comply with the requirements placed on them by the discourse of transnational 'pride' and, consequently, qualify for being a compatriot, may in turn commodify their linguistic allegiance alongside with their other loyalties. The Russian State Program for the Resettling of Compatriots (2013-2020) offers for those Russian speakers who wish to return to the land of their heritage 7,321 rubles for travel and 60,782 rubles for other resettlement costs, and provides them with a mortgage on a house or land purchase along with other benefits including university student scholarships. Naturally, apart from producing new obedient Russian-speaking citizens, the Compatriots program has another objective, that is, to address Russia's growing demographic problem. The target is currently for 300,000 compatriots to be returned annually and to be settled in Russian sparsely populated territories, primarily in and around the Siberian Novosibirsk region known for its hostile climate and poor infrastructure (Gosudarstvennaia Programma 'Sootechestvenniki' 2013-2020; Obrashchenie 2012). So, the official compatriot discourse combines the profit that one could expect from fluency in Russian with the pride linked to the demonstration of loyalty to the language, culture and the state. This is overlaid by the instrumental meanings equally

attached to Russian as it features as a vehicle of producing Russia's supporters abroad and the controlled inward migration and re-population of Siberian areas.

### *The Eurasian Union discourse*

Russian economic success achieved in the second half of the 2000s blew into the sails of Russian regional integrational ideology. In about 25 years of post-Soviet existence, Russia led numerous attempts at re-integration of the former Soviet space in various configurations. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) formed at the deathbed of the Soviet Union has never grown into a full-blooded functioning institution. Consequently, creating alternative viable fora for what Libman and Vinokurov call 'holding-together regionalism' (2012, 2) became a key issue of Putin's doctrine (Hoffmann 2012: 2). After an array of partially overlapping organizations were formed and 'remained fragmented and incomplete' (Oksanian 2012), more determination was demonstrated by the emergence of the Customs Union in 2010, amalgamating Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Having removed barriers to the movement of trade, capital and labor (Hartwell 2013), this evolved from January 2015 into the Eurasian Economic Union, envisaging in future a full economic integration, a currency union and nurturing broader ambitions beyond the economic agenda (Libman and Vinokurov 2012, 3). On 2 January 2015 the Eurasian Union was joined by Armenia while currently Kyrgyzstan is set to follow suit.

The Russian language acknowledged as the new Union's lingua franca was conceived as central to the Eurasian Union project. This has been interpreted by some observers as part of the asymmetries of power relations between the Union member states, together with other Moscow-favoring political arrangements, such as the plans for the headquarters of the Union Commission to be based in Moscow and for the ruble be the common currency (Popescu 2014: 16). Despite the fact that Russian is an official language in both Kazakhstan and Belarus these countries have responded to Russia's linguistic promotion as evidence of being placed in the subordinate role and have consequently been expressly cautious of further expansion of integration (Dutkiewicz 2015, 8). Thus, the value of Russian in the Eurasian discourse is intensively negotiated and seen as a symbol of unity, a facilitator of prosperity and an index of unequal power distribution. Interpreting Russian as undoubtedly a 'profit' indicator, a leading specialist in the Eurasian integration economics Evgeny Vinokurov argues that its use in the integrative process is an unchallengeable, top

quality commodity which translates into an overall benevolent integrative impact on the Union's operations: 'the Russian language plays a huge role as a means of integration. Research shows that the use of a common language has a positive effect on the intensity of trade and investment relationships' (2013, 21). Elsewhere this value is illustrated with statistics measuring the use of Russian in the percentage of productivity increase: it is claimed that those countries that have a common language enjoy a 50-60% higher trade level than those that do not (Libman and Vinokurov 2012, 117).

Similarly, Russian official discourse customarily attributes a pivotal 'profit' meaning to the use of Russian within the Eurasian Union. The value of Russian as the prime resource of the Union was indicated by declaring it a factor of 'communicational integration' (Mikheeva 2014), 'the language of the ruble' (tipped to be the Union's common currency) (Matvienko 2012), while the Union itself was increasingly called the 'Russian linguo-cultural space' (Kobzar' 2013). Putin speaking at the Russia's People's Front Forum in December 2013 and putting Russian in the centre of the Eurasian universe said that among 'the very many advantages' of the Eurasian Union over other integration projects, 'the first and most important is the language of international communication, Russian' (Putin 2013). The argumentation topos of economic co-operation 'benefit' in this and other texts legitimizes the centrality of Russian, constructing it as a transnational facilitator of economic prosperity for all member states. However as the Example (3) from the 2012 Agreed Statement issued by the State Duma illustrates, what looks on the surface as the discourse of 'profit' reveals the signs of appropriation by the transnational 'pride' semantics.

(3) Государственная Дума считает, что русский язык должен стать надежной цементирующей основой будущего Евразийского экономического союза и призывает предпринять все возможные усилия, направленные на качественный рост российского культурного присутствия за пределами Российской Федерации. (Zaiavlenie 2012)

[The State Duma considers that the Russian language must become a reliant cementing basis of the future Eurasian Economic Union and calls to undertake all possible efforts directed at a qualitative growth of Russian cultural presence outside the Russian Federation.]

The statement might well give an impression that Russian is attributed in it a role of an economic commodity however the Duma's discursive means of articulation arrive from a different semantic field. The text is structured by the 'language is cement' metaphor and by the imperative mood (*должен* [must]) that together suggest an imposition of the centrality and fixity of Russian which is expected to bind the states in the future Union. The agency is also significant: the Russian language and culture are construed as some static substance which is qualified by nominalization as having 'presence' in the states in question (*присутствие* [presence]). In order to achieve the 'cementing' capacity, the language whose current presence is judged by the Duma as insufficient, needs to undergo a transformation foisted on it by some unnamed agents whose activity (depicted by the verbal phrase *предпринять усилия* [undertake efforts]) would vigorously propel a substantive (*качественный* [qualitative]) growth of the language. The high level of intensity of these agents' efforts is highlighted through exaggeration ('all possible efforts').

Thus the Duma excerpt (3) does not seem to take for granted the commodity value for the member-states of the Russian language -- this explains the calls for it to be intensely propped up by invasive actions and resources, pointing rather to the transnational 'pride' meaning attribution. Within this interpretation, the term 'presence' may be seen as a military euphemism reminiscent of the phrase *военное присутствие* [military presence]. The phrase is habitually used in Russian to describe the deployment of troops in a foreign territory. Usually, *присутствие* in the military meaning forms collocates with the cognates of *рост* [growth] and *сила* [power, strength] (*наращивать/ усиливать* [to increase/ strengthen]), both of which occurring in the Duma text.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the commodification of Russian in the Eurasian Economic Union turns out to be more about imposition of Russian upon the member states and the instrumental use of the language for re-establishing hierarchies in the post-Soviet space. This demonstrates that the 'profit' trope in relation to Russian as the language of economic prosperity in the Eurasian Union is heavily entangled with a linguistic ideology that normalizes the dominance of Russian in the post-Soviet space.

The unequivocal statement of the ideology of Russian as an instrument for empire building was voiced in the Duma debates of 16 May 2014 by Mikhail Degtiarev (LDPR). He used the common trope of the Russian language as a transnational connector, but employed the topos of the temporal erasure thereby

equating the Eurasian Union with the Soviet Union and the Russian empire (Example 4).

(4) Русский язык столетиями — это очевидно — способствовал укреплению межнациональных связей народов в едином многонациональном Российском государстве, которое называлось по-разному: и Российская Империя, и Советский Союз, сегодня — Евразийский союз. (Duma 16 May 2014)

[It is obvious that the Russian language for centuries has facilitated the strengthening of the international links between the nations in one multinational Russian state that had different names: Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and today – the Eurasian Union.]

Example (4) demonstrates that transnational ‘pride’ overtones of Russian speaking while heightening its integrational meaning at the same time constructs and normalizes the neo-imperial instrumentality attached to it.

### **From commodification to weaponization**

#### *Linguistic seduction of Ukraine*

In the Russian dominant discourse the events in Ukraine -- the Maidan anti-corruption revolution, the ensuing Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the proxy war in the South-Eastern Ukrainian regions (2014 - to date) were framed by the linguistic narrative. At the earlier stages of the crisis we encounter the discourse of ‘profit’ in which the linguistic argument was linked to the advantages for Ukraine of joining the Eurasian Union rather than signing the Association agreement with the European Union. Ukraine mattered for Russia’s ‘holding together’ regionalism so much that arguably ‘[t]he Eurasian Economic Union was to a large degree conceived and designed to attract Ukraine’ (Popescu 2014, 27). Ukraine mattered for the developing Eurasian Union for many economic reasons: having an established close trade with Poland, it was wanted as a bridge between the Union and the Western countries. More than that, Ukraine mattered symbolically as one of the three Slavic nations ‘destined’ to be linked together (Hartwell 2013), but even more so, it mattered as Putin’s personal obsession, a mirror to his political failures and humiliations, which he had to get under control.

In the pre-Maidan period, the Russian elite discourse spelled out the advantages for Ukraine to join the Eurasian Union through the ‘profit’ trope which was mixed with the transnational ‘pride’ narrative built on the argument of closeness of origin, language and culture between Russia and Ukraine. The Russian language was similarly portrayed through the semantics of closeness to Ukrainian, as for example, in an excerpt (5) from Putin’s September 2013 speech in which he importuned Ukraine to reject the partnership agreement with the EU and to join instead the Eurasian Union. Arguing for the economic benefits of such a move, Putin portrays the Russian language through the semantics of similarity with Ukrainian and uses the linguistic and cultural reasons for construction of commonality:

(5) Киевская Русь началась как основа будущего огромного Российского государства. У нас общая традиция, общая ментальность, общая история, общая культура. У нас очень близкие языки. В этом смысле, я ещё раз хочу повторить, мы один народ... Это часть нашего большого российского мира, российско-украинского. (Valdai Forum, 19 September 2013)

[Kievan Rus originated as a foundation of the future huge Russian state. We have a common tradition, common mentality, common history and common culture. *Our languages are similar, and in this respect I would like to reiterate that we are one people...* This is part of our large Russian world, the Russian-Ukrainian world.]

Here, Putin uses the transnational ‘pride’ trope to erase the differences between Russia and Ukraine and construct the category of ‘one people’ (*один народ*). This strategy works together with other tools such as employing the topos ‘history justifies present actions and judgements’ when he evokes the memory of the Medieval Kievan Rus as a common space, and using synonymously the notions of the ‘Russia-Ukrainian world’, the ‘huge Russian state’, and the ‘Russian world’.

The purpose of Putin’s transnational ‘pride’ discourse is instrumental -- to legitimize what he sees as the inevitability for Ukraine to be together with Russia. This argument is also supported by a generous cash offer to the economically struggling neighbor: Putin’s tropes of commonality are followed by an announcement that in case Ukraine chooses the path of the Eurasian Union it would receive \$9 bn from Russia in the form of energy price reductions. The linguistic similarity as the ‘pride’ token may

thus be exchanged for Russia's treatment of Ukraine as a privileged business partner, in other words, language and culture may be considered as a factor of 'profit'. The 'profit' itself is rather imitative as it is appropriated by an instrumental objective to make Ukraine compliant to the Russian will. It works in addition to the linguistic and cultural argument of closeness which allows Putin to discursively subsume Ukraine into the category of the 'Russian world', in other words, to symbolically take it under Russian control.

### *Linguistic weaponization as inverse transnational 'pride'*

The Ukrainian conflict has revealed that advancing a revisionist agenda, Russia aims to redraft the post-Second world war world order and has proposed to the world its own variant of globalization, in which Russia is restored to the status of a major world power with its own spheres of influence, civilizational differentiation and messianic engagement with its neighbors. For this vision, Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss have suggested the term 'malevolent globalization' (2014, 43). They explain that the key feature of malevolent globalization is the reconsideration of the soft power approach to the outside world and weaponization of its major tools, namely information, culture and money. Pomerantsev and Weiss's subtle analysis of Russia's contemporary international behavior however overlooks language as a crucial Russian weaponization mechanism, which the section below attempts to remedy, looking at weaponization within the 'pride' and 'profit' paradigm.

Efforts to convert linguistic elements into tools of conquest have been made from time immemorial and currently there is a growing research interest in the subject (for e.g. Matsuda et al. 1995; Lecercle and Riley 2005; Pratt 2009; Rafael 2012). However the ways how the discourses about language are engaged in this process have not been sufficiently discussed. Using Pomerantsev and Weiss' understanding of malevolent globalization, the rest of the section taps into this debate and explores the role of the elite discourse on the Russian language as a facilitator of weaponization. It focuses on how during the Russo-Ukrainian crisis the meanings of 'pride' and 'profit' attached to Russian have been converted from the means of soft power to weapons of warmongering.

Discursive evidence shows that after Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich had abruptly relinquished, in November 2013, the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU and Ukraine erupted with the pro-European revolution, the semantics

attached to the Russian language began to change. Just as before it represented Russian as a vehicle for Ukraine to improve its economy and receive Russian cash bonuses, now the narrative of Russian began to be employed to build solidarity with one part of the Ukrainian society and against the other, and to justify and legitimize Russia's aggressive behavior towards its neighbor.

Mary Pratt notes that linguistic weaponization is a way of constructing an enemy: 'War by its adversarial logic produces multilingual scenarios; linguistic difference marks others, and others easily become enemies' (Pratt 2009, 1525). So, value began to be attributed not to the closeness of the two brotherly, almost indistinguishable, languages undergirding 'one nation', but singularly to Ukrainian Russian speakers depicted to be in need of protection from the 'aggressive' Ukrainian language, which is about to take over Russian, and from the fierce and threatening Ukrainian-speaking 'fascists' – the term which the Russian propaganda adopted for Ukrainophones (Ryazanova-Clarke 2014; Gaufman 2015; Platt 2015).

Dominant Russian discourses shaped the weaponization campaign by widely employing the dismantling strategies in relation to the two languages. For example, the strategy of differentiation which constructed and reinforced a boundary and a sense of alienation between the Ukrainian and Russian languages became the staple of Russia's spiraling war machine. This tool may be seen in the Example (6):

(6) Именно поэтому восстал украинский Юго-Восток, не желающий говорить на чужом языке. (*Izvestiia*, April 11, 2014)

[It is because of this that the Ukrainian South-East has rebelled, who *did not want to speak an alien language*]

The excerpt (6) from the Kremlin controlled *Izvestiia* newspaper demonstrates how, in order to legitimize Russian aggression, the Ukrainian language which earlier had been ascribed the 'pride' value of being a part of Russian civilizational belonging, has been described as an alien, foreign and dissimilar to Russian. The dismantling strategy is compounded of the polarization and dichotomization of Russian and Ukrainian represented as two languages separated by a clear, impenetrable boundary into 'us' and 'the aliens'. This portrayal suppresses the knowledge that apart from Russian-Ukrainian mutual comprehensibility, the large proportion of people in Ukraine use dialects and mixtures such as the wide-spread Russian-Ukrainian *surzhyk* (Bilaniuk



1997, 2004, 2005; Flier 2000; Kulyk 2010), which also is fluid and varied (Bilaniuk 2004). Weaponized Russian is no longer depicted to be a transnational unifier of multilingual groups, it rather assists in forming allegiances to new illusionary categories, first of all, that of the ‘threatened monolingual speakers of standard Russian abroad fighting for their linguistic rights’.

The discursive portrayal of the ‘world’ has also changed from the ‘Russo-Ukrainian world’ of Putin’s 2013 speech. The post-Maidan ‘world’ becomes unhyphenatedly Russian for, despite their varied ethnic and civic identities, Russian speakers in Crimea and the East of Ukraine are categorized as belonging to the nation of the ‘Russian world’ torn apart. Menkiszak observes that indeed, evolution of Russia’s policy towards Ukraine was a catalyst for the reification of the Kremlin-born ‘Russian world’ doctrine, so Russia’s assumed role of a defender of Russian speaking communities in the post-Soviet states encouraged the doctrine to formulate ‘more openly and in more radical terms’ (2014: 1) its conceptual framework for Russian dominance in the post-Soviet area.

In a speech delivered on the day of the signing an Agreement on the Admission of Crimea into the Russian Federation on 18 April 2014, Putin used the trope of the ‘separated Russian people’ for the first time stating that ‘Russian people became one of the largest, if not to say the largest, separated nation in the world’ (Putin 2014b).<sup>5</sup> Many observers have noted that this is reminiscent of the doctrine used by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg on the annexation of Sudetenland in 1938; while a similar rhetoric of a ‘divided Serbian nation’ was employed by the war crimes perpetrator Slobodan Milošević (Illarionov 2014).

In this rhetoric, the integrational transnational qualities of Russian are still asserted to unite the Russian-speaking ‘world’ but are reconfigured, rebranded and realigned along the new lines of attraction and repulsion. Russian is now a tool which assists ‘collecting Russian lands’ with Putin as the chief agent who has brought the speakers of Russian into the fold of their lost metropolis.

In another discursive event – a press-conference given during the build up to the conflict on 4 March 2014 (Example 7), Putin inverts the ‘pride’ trope to present the argument of the ‘protection’ of Russian speakers to justify Russian military advance in Eastern Ukraine:

(7) Putin: И вот когда мы это видим, мы тогда понимаем, что беспокоит граждан Украины – и русских, и украинцев, вообще русскоязычное население, проживающее в восточных и в южных регионах Украины. Их беспокоит вот такой беспредел. И если мы увидим, что этот беспредел начинается в восточных регионах, если люди попросят нас о помощи [...], то мы оставляем за собой право использовать все имеющиеся у нас средства для защиты этих граждан.

[Putin: When we see this we understand what worries citizens of Ukraine – Russians, Ukrainians and generally Russian-speakers inhabiting East and South of Ukraine. This lawlessness worries them. And if we notice that this lawlessness starts in the Eastern regions and if people ask us for help, *then we leave for ourselves the right to use any means that we have to protect these citizens.*] (Putin, 2014a)

Suppressing their ethnicity and citizenship, Putin identifies Ukrainian Russian speakers as a homogenous group through their linguistic characteristic ('generally Russian-speakers') and regards this characteristic as an entitlement for Russia to take action to protect them 'with all means available'. Henceforth such inverse transnational 'pride' discourse calling for revenge against those prosecuting Russian-speaking in Ukraine has been commonly used in Russian dominant narrative. A similar 'pride' trope is employed in the Duma contributions as illustrated in Example (8): stories told by the deputies emphasize the alleged violence perpetrated against Russian speakers while the latter are depicted as passive victims. Weaponization is further supported by regularly evoking the emotive semantic fields related to the Second World War and Nazi Germany to constitute the Ukrainian events and legitimize a military protective invasion against atrocities that Russian speech is allegedly subjected to:

(8) V. Zhirinovskii: вот дать равные права [русским]... не хотят: идёт не просто зажим культуры, газет, радио, школ — *сегодня избивают русских за то, что они говорят по-русски!* (Шум в зале.) В Киеве или в Одессе, если правые радикалы *выходят на улицу и слышат русскую речь, они этих русскоговорящих людей подвергают физическому насилию — такого не*

*было ни в одной стране мира, даже в фашистской Германии!* (Duma 4 April 2014)

[see, they do not want to give equal rights to Russians. They do not just discriminate against [Russian] culture, press, radio, schools – *today they beat up Russians for speaking Russian!* (Agitation in the audience) In Kiev or Odessa, when the right-wing radicals *get out in the streets and hear Russian speech they subject these Russian speakers to physical violence – this has never happened in any country of the world, not even in Nazi Germany!*]

Thus, the purpose of weaponization affords extra instrumental values to be attached to the language and renders other values imitational. In the case of the Ukrainian conflict it inverted the transnational meanings of Russian. The trope of transnational ‘pride’ associated with commonality and, linked to it, ‘profit’ that had precipitated the war have disappeared from the discursive sight, giving out its imitational nature and yielding to the inverse, divisive transnational trope of ‘pride’ that announcing outright violence and aggression. Moreover, as Pratt confirms, ‘war weaponizes the capacity of lying to produce injury, and deception for this purpose is sanctioned and indeed valued’ (2009: 1524). So, as the rules of war dictate, stories of linguistic threats and persecutions of speakers that stand behind the weaponization of Russian, are based on a fantasy, or plainly speaking, on a lie instrumental for production of the inverse ‘pride’ values suitable for the new contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Sakwa notes that “‘the international’ in Russian thinking has been both constitutive of its civilizational identity while at the same time the source of systemic conflict’ (2011, 958). Patterns of meaning attribution to Russian with regard to its transnational ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ show a profound aptness of this observation. From deeply ingrained, centuries-long Russian discourses, the narrative of civilizational Russian endeavor stretching far beyond Russia’s geographical borders has re-emerged, engendering a very specific transnational ‘pride’ trope and, in the recent years, has formed a conflicting symbiosis with the ‘profit’ trope originated from Russia’s exposure to economic globalization. As the globalized incarnation of the Russian economy departs from the neo-liberal capitalist models and privileges political solutions, this impacts on the nature of the relations between discursive tropes of

‘pride’ and ‘profit’ associated with the Russian language. Dominant discourses of the Russian language in the three transnational contexts – the narratives of compatriots, of the Eurasian Union and the Ukrainian crisis -- demonstrate that ‘pride’ and ‘profit’ may become indistinguishable and appear in a number of transmutations, guises and imitations. Not least of those is the case of weaponization of Russian, the narrative in which the language comes clothed in an inverse transnational ‘pride’. As Pomerantsev (2014) put it, the Russian world is the one in which ‘nothing is true and everything is possible’. It is a world in which imitational ‘profit’ reveals a hindsides of the hastily manufactured ‘pride’ while commodification yields weaponization.

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<sup>1</sup> These include, for example, the Izborsk Club (a conservative and Russian nationalist and imperialist think-tank close to the Kremlin, see <http://www.dynacon.ru/index.php>); the staunch conservative newspaper *Zavtra* and the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (a Kremlin think-tank which was founded in the place of a former branch of Russia's foreign intelligence service, see for e.g. Volchek 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> All translation from Russian in this article is by the present author.

<sup>3</sup> Rossotrudnochestvo emerged on the old structures of Roszarubezhtsentr (see Saari 2014, 61).

<sup>4</sup> See an example provided in the National Corpus of Russian:

Американцы в течение нескольких последних лет настойчиво требовали от Финляндии *усилить военное присутствие* в Афганистане. [During the recent years, the Americans demanded that Finland strengthens its military deployment in Afghanistan] (*Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 1 March 2011), <http://www.ruscorpora.ru/>

<sup>5</sup> русский народ стал одним из самых больших, если не сказать, самым большим разделённым народом в мире.